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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups: tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family

Statement submitted by Soroptimist International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; and European Union of Women, Foundation for the Rights of the Family, International Confederation of Christian Family Movements, International Council of Psychologists, International Council on Alcohol and Addictions, International Kolping Society, and Pax Romana (International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs and International Movement of Catholic Students), non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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We the undersigned international non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council,

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Recognize

"that the family is the basic unit of society and that it plays a key role in social development and is a strong force of social cohesion and integration. In different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of family exist. Further recognize that equality and equity between women and men and respect for the rights of all family members are essential for family well-being and for society at large, and promote appropriate actions to meets the needs of families and their individuals members, particularly in the areas of economic support and provision of social services. Greater attention should be paid to helping the family in its supporting, educating and nurturing roles, to the causes and consequences of family disintegration, and to the adoption of measures to reconcile work and family life for women and men."(Twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, "Further initiatives for social development", para. 56, Geneva 26 June-1 July 2000)"

Recall that :

"Helping the family in its supporting, educating and nurturing roles in contributing to social integration should involve: (a) Encouraging social and economic policies that are designed to meet the needs of families and their individual members, especially the most disadvantaged members, with particular attention to the care of children; (b) Insuring opportunities for family members to understand and meet their social responsibilities; (c) Promoting mutual respect, tolerance and cooperation within the family and within society; (d) Promoting equal partnership between women and men in the family." (World Summit for Social Development, Programme of Action, para. 80, Copenhagen 1995)

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In the modern world, society is made up of a complex set of relationships; among them the family should be conceived as a very unique relationship based on equity, reciprocity and respect between genders and generations, law and custom.

Families come in many forms and varieties, and there is change over the life cycle of individual families. A family-friendly society is one that recognizes the diversity of family forms and respects the unique conditions, benefits and problems each family experiences in the execution of its functions.

There is no simple view of the family, nor can there be a universally applicable definition. Throughout history and in differents parts of the world, many types of families exist, with pronounced variations in their structures. New and divergent family forms are constantly evolving. This diversity is a faithful reflection of the cultural pluralism of the individuals that constitute society.

The relative strength of a nation or society depends largely on the strength of the family. What occurs in families affects the whole of society and viceversa. Most countries still rely on families to provide the basic safety net to care for its members. Because of the bonding involved, humans are best cared for by those who know and love them.

In providing care for the weaker and most vulnerable members – children, disabled, old and sick people – the family carries out a crucial societal function. Families are the main providers of basic services such as adequate food, shelter, clothing and supportive interaction as well as being the source of human capital for society.

We, therefore, urge that:

Families, being expert in their own affairs, should be enabled to be full and active partners in decision-making, policy formulation and the design and evaluation of public services and should be assisted and encouraged to fulfil their responsibilities.

Policy makers should be aware of the state of family functioning in their national societies. The detection of the ability, or inability, of families to carry out their functions is a pragmatic and thus valuable approach to identifying unmet needs and isolating specific targets for intervention.

Policies and programmes designed for family members should focus attention on the fact that families are units with their own dynamics and are primary resources in meeting the needs of such groups; to the extent that such policies and programmes do not take into account this fact, they are prone to failure.

The increasing employment of women and the emerging new roles of men are major changes with regard to family responsibilities. The involvement of the father in family functions, as well as the reconciliation of work and family life, should be identified as an important issue to be further developed.

World attention should be focused on the important role played by families especially in the care of those affected by HIV/AIDS and on what can be done to decrease the spread of the virus in order to prevent the erosion of the family unit.

We, hence, expect:

That policy-makers at all levels, in focusing on family concerns, will develop an approach to social development which would synthetize and integrate diverse issues, in an interdisciplinary and multisectoral approach.

That families, as a legitimate focus of social policy, will be placed on the agenda and included in the **multi-year programme of work 2002-2006 of the Commission for Social Development**, and that long-term goals will be set after the celebration of the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family in those plans and programme of action.

That the General Assembly of the United Nations, in recognition of the tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004, give priority to continue funding for family issues within the Secretariat of the United Nations, which is essential to maintaining important networks of government, International and Civil Society Organisations, involved in strengthening families.

That the possibility of the documentation of world-wide institution building endeavours, including those organized by civil society organizations, to conmemorate the tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family, is envisaged.